

# FRAGMENTS

The Collected Wisdom of

# HERACLITUS

*Translated by Brooks Haxton*

*With a foreword by James Hillman*

VIKING

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*for Mary Karr*

## *Acknowledgments*

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## Foreword: “I am as I am not”

Because archetypal modes of thought transcend time and place, the insights of Heraclitus are strikingly postmodern. Although conceived five hundred years before our era in the Greek city of Ephesus, his poetic aphorisms show a deconstructive mind at work. The life of thought does not necessarily progress, for, as he says, “Any day stands equal to the rest” (120). Since moving forward and moving back are one and the same (69), the latest postmodern thinking completes the circle where Heraclitus began: “The beginning is the end” (70).

Early Greek thinkers sought the stuff of which the world was made. For Thales, it was water; for Anaximenes, air; for Anaximander, a combination of hot and cold. Empedocles expanded the stuff to four indestructible elemental principles, while Anaxagoras is said to have proposed innumerable generative seeds composing the nature of things. The Atomists abstracted the seeds yet further, proposing multiple particles moving in a void. The Pythagoreans found the truth of the world lies in numbers, their proportions and relations, and Parmenides, the most metaphysical of them all, laid out his theory of the cosmos through the sheer power of logical thought.

Heraclitus took a different tack. His method is more psychological. He posited no basic substance, nor did he abstract the world of the senses into numbers, atoms, or assertions about Being as a whole. Instead he said, nothing is stable; all is in flux. Whatever you say about anything, its opposite is equally true. He brought language into the game of cosmological thinking. Declarations will always be self-contradictory, relative, subjective. “People dull their wits with gibberish, and cannot use their ears and eyes” (4). “They lack the skill to listen or to speak” (6). You cannot know the world in the manner of natural philosophy or mathematics or deductive logic. Because: “By cosmic rule . . . all things change” (36). “The sun is new again, all day” (32). “The river where you set your foot just now is gone—those waters giving way to this, now this” (41).

His name for this changing flux, or process, in today’s terms, is “fire,” a metaphor for the shifting meanings of all truth. Therefore, the verbal account, or *logos*, of the world is also fire. Truth, wisdom, knowledge, reality—none can stand apart from this fire that allows no objective fixity.

Heraclitean fire, it must be insisted, is neither a metaphysical essence like the elements of his peers, nor a spiritual energy, nor a material substance, the fire that burns your hand. His fire is metaphorical, a psychological intensity that penetrates through all literalisms, a quicksilver fire that flows through the hand, burning away whatever tries to grasp reality and hold it firm. This fire, as the active principle of deconstruction, brilliantly deconstructs itself.

You can, however, reflect your own mind, see into your own thoughts. You

can become psychological or, as he puts it, “Applicants for wisdom do what I have done: inquire within” (80). “People ought to know themselves” (106). This psychological turn means you cannot know the psyche no matter how endless your search (71), since consciousness is always also its opposite, unconsciousness. How better say this than: “I am as I am not” (81).

Statements pertaining to sleep add support to my notion of Heraclitus the psychologist. Rather than a focus upon the healing efficacy of dreams as in the Asclepian cult of his time or upon their prognostic meaning as summed up in Egyptian and later Greek writing by Artemidorus, Heraclitus simply states that the *logos* is active in sleep. Even while you are resting, the fire burns. Dreaming is the flickering activity of the mind participating in the world’s imagination. Whether the dream helps us feel better and sleep better, cures our distress, or prefigures our destiny, is less its essential nature than its energetic spontaneity. During sleep, we may be each apart from the commonly shared day-world, yet the never-resting *logos* goes on producing images ever new as the sun each day, as the river’s flowing. In our private rest, the restlessness of the cosmos continues to do its work.

For all the puzzling juxtapositions—hot/cold, pure/tainted, war/peace, plenty/famine—that quicken the reader’s speculations, Heraclitus insists on a keen practical sense of things. No lofty idealism or dulling generalities that smooth over life’s honest hardness. “Hungry livestock, though in sight of pasture, need the prod” (55). “War makes us as we are” (62). “The poet was a fool who wanted no conflict” (43). “The mind . . . needs strength” (45).

No sloppy emotionalism either. Heraclitus would hardly be found among enthusiastic revivalists or holistic healers of the New Age. “Dry, the soul grows wise and good” (74). “Moisture makes the soul succumb . . .” (72), which I have understood to be a warning against drowning in easiness. Comfortable, complacent, content—these soporifics extinguish the fire of the soul.

Moreover, no religiosity. Fragments 116 onward state pithy truths that do not let us escape into wishful denials of realities. “Those who mouth high talk may think themselves high-minded” (118). Neither your hope nor your fantasies tell you anything about what comes after death (122). The unknown is not revealed by faith (116). Fate is not governed from elsewhere, but is in your character, the way you bear yourself each day (121). Because humans understand so little of the gods (126), the initiations and mysteries we practice are not true holiness (125).

Haxton’s English captures Heraclitus’s toughmindedness: “One thunderbolt strikes root through everything” (28). “War, as father of all things, and king . . . (44). “Hunger, even in the elements, and insolence” (24). “The mind . . . that strains against itself, needs strength, as does the arm . . .” (45).

The Heraclitean vision is Greek: the inhuman nature of the gods is borne out by the facts of nature and by the tragic flaws in human biography. The fire is demanding, and it takes its toll.

As well as giving a vision of the nature of things and the truth of the world we live in, the passages state a poetics of dissonance—another reason



Heraclitus has appeal for writers, artists, and psychologists. In the heart of the mind there is a tension. We are pulled apart, enflamed, and at risk. Therefore, our expressions must hold the tension so as to bespeak accurately and poignantly the actual soul as it exists. “How, from a fire that never sinks or sets, would you escape?” (27).

Heraclitus has also bequeathed to Western culture a mode of expressing this fire: the aphoristic phrase. The body of work attributed to him consists in a collection of incendiary sparks that scholarship calls “fragments,” as if to say the work is incomplete, only shards of a lost whole. But scholarship misses the fact that the style is the message. The snapshot, the *aperçu*, reveals things as they are: “The eye, the ear, the mind in action, these I value” (13). To speculate about the lost book distracts from the power of the fragments and their message: all things change, all things flow. The world is revealed only in quick glances. There can be no completion. “Things keep their secrets” (10), because they cannot be fixed into the comprehensive formulations of a book. No sooner known and explained, the event has changed. Therefore, “the known way is an impasse” (7).

Faced with this impasse, usual thinkers try to grasp the flow either by religious mystification or by overprecise and reductive explanations (11). Whereas the thinker (the “true prophet”) who is on track speaks in signs, much like gestures, hints, and metaphors that neither reveal nor conceal. These signs allow for many meanings with ambiguous and suggestive possibilities. Again, I see a parallel with the psychological approach to interpretation. It favors responses in metaphors, images, sharp-pointed insights that stir the mind to awakened observation and deepened reflection.

We are still riddling out these “fragments” generation after generation in ever-new, and necessary, fresh translations. Translations age, even though the original texts do not. In fact, classic texts are rejuvenated by virtue of fresh translation. If all things flow, then each translation must be different from every other one, yet still be the same, much as Heraclitus’s river. Or, to say it otherwise, the sun is new every day—and Haxton offers a translation for this day, our day.

Heraclitus has moved philosophers from Plato through Nietzsche, Whitehead, Heidegger, and Jung, and as Haxton says in his admirably condensed introduction, it is mainly from philosophers (ancient writers and Church Fathers) that the fragments have been culled and passed on. Therefore, everything we read and refer to as “Heraclitus” is second- or thirdhand—even fourth, in that the Greek and Latin have been turned into English. What Heraclitus actually said, or wrote, we have only signs pointing to the authority of a half-revealed, half-concealed author. I like to think he would have enjoyed this deconstruction of his lasting words through the centuries of time.

## Introduction

When the iron hoe was a new invention, Pythagoras saw mathematical logic as a language of cosmic prophecy. Now, when we say  $E = mc^2$ , we are stating in mathematical terms the thought of Pythagoras's contemporary, Heraclitus, who said that energy is the essence of matter. Heraclitus put it in the ancient Greek this way:

All things change to fire,  
and fire exhausted  
falls back into things.

Einstein agreed. For him, the earth, the sun and moon and stars, the winds and waters, everything, became energy in flux, in relativity, and the world was staggered by mental shock, then by physical explosions. But the wisdom of Heraclitus held true twenty-five hundred years after his death.

Heir to the throne in Ephesus, one of the world's richest and most powerful cities, Heraclitus gave up the kingdom and chose, instead of the trappings of power, to seek the Word of wisdom. His writings survived the Persian empire, dominant in his time, and then the Greek, and Roman. For hundreds of years, great writers, Plato, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, and others, quoted him with respect. Then, his book, with thousands of the finest works of that world, disappeared forever.

Scholars describe this lost book as the first coherent philosophical treatise. But the existing fragments resemble prophecy and poetry as much as they do philosophical discourse. After all, philosophy had just begun. Pythagoras had only lately coined the word "philosopher," meaning lover of wisdom. But the pursuit of wisdom is much older than Pythagoras or his word for himself as a serious student.

Heraclitus uses the word for wisdom, *sophos*, thirteen times in the surviving fragments of his work. The one time he mentions philosophers, he speaks of their need for learning. But he says that wisdom is beyond learning and beyond cleverness: "Of all the words yet spoken none comes quite as far as wisdom, which is the action of the mind beyond all things that may be said." "Wisdom," he says, "is the oneness of mind that guides and permeates all things." For Heraclitus, wisdom, much like fire, is the very essence of the cosmos.

Before Heraclitus, the traditions most attentive to this oneness existed in various cultures as wisdom poetry. Farther to the east, Gautama Buddha, another prince who deserted his kingdom for the pursuit of wisdom, was an exact contemporary of Heraclitus, as were the legendary Lao-tzu and

Confucius, all closely associated with poetic traditions of wisdom.

Wisdom poetry is often allied with religion, but it is distinct from the religious poetries of prayer, praise, and narrative, because it focuses above all on the task of speaking wisdom. The wisdom books best known in European cultures are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. Anyone can see marked similarities between the so-called pessimism of Heraclitus and that in the Book of Ecclesiastes, written not far to the south during the same century.

Equally striking similarities may be found between the wisdom of Heraclitus and that in other traditions. A man disillusioned to the point of wanting to die, in the famous Egyptian *Dispute Between a Man and His Soul*, for example, feels trapped, like those said by Heraclitus to be “confined in the sodden lumber of the body.” The Egyptian seeks “the movement of eternal return.” He awaits “the Mystical Encounter with the Lord of Transformations hidden in [his] body,” this Lord being the falcon god Sokar, who disappears with his prey into the fire of the sun.<sup>1</sup>

All this represents the body, fire, death, and transformation much as Heraclitus would describe them more than a thousand years later. Heraclitus says of the dead: “Corpses, like night soil, get carted off . . .”; “Souls change into water on their way toward death . . .”; and “Fire of all things is the judge and ravisher.” The Egyptian poet says of the dead man “cast from his house and flung upon the hill” that “the flood takes him, the sun takes him, fish talk to him in shallow water.”

Most germane to Heraclitus of all these traditions may be the Persian. Persia in his time, consolidated under Darius to control almost all of Asia Minor, was the inheritor of the legacy of Sumer, with a two-thousand-year-old tradition of wisdom poetry. Persia’s most powerful new religion was the worship of the Lord Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, as taught by the prophet Zarathustra, who lived earlier in the same century as Heraclitus. A tenet of Zoroastrian teaching was the identification of wisdom with an ever-living fire, *pyr aeizōon*, as Heraclitus calls his version.

Such resemblances are too poignant to ignore, and who would want to ignore them, and why? But historical connections are doubtful. Heraclitus never mentions the Lord Wisdom. Yet the word *theos* does appear nine times among the fragments. Scholars differ in their exact sense of the tone and meaning of this word, which is translated most literally as “god.” Clearly, Heraclitus meant to distinguish his attitude from others more prevalent at the time. He says:

They raise their voices  
at stone idols  
as a man might argue  
with his doorpost,  
they have understood  
so little of the gods.

The conventional presences of the Greek gods hover at the edges of these

fragments, especially Apollo, god of prophecy and cosmic fire, but *theos* also refers to a presence distinct from any mythological person. This presence is as vital to the thought of Heraclitus as are wisdom, the Word, and fire. Heraclitus makes this clear when he speaks of the rule of *theos* in fragment 36:

By cosmic rule,  
as day yields night,  
so winter summer,  
war peace, plenty famine.  
All things change.  
Fire penetrates the lump  
of myrrh, until the joining  
bodies die and rise again  
in smoke called incense.

In another of the fragments, Heraclitus hints at his kinship with the poets and prophets, when he says, “Without obscurity or needless explanation the true prophet signifies.” The very closeness of this association may account for the need in Heraclitus to set his work apart, when he says outright, “We need no longer take the poets and myth-makers for sure witnesses about disputed facts.”

Heraclitus is at equal pains to distinguish himself from philosophers he mentions, and from his contemporaries in general, from the few who consider wisdom, without understanding, and from the many who make no attempt.

To a sober mind, the drunkenness of cultic worshippers must have been particularly unappealing in a cosmopolitan city like Ephesus, with gods of wine on every side, drunken Greeks initiated into the Thracian ecstasies of Dionysus running amok with drunken Phrygians worshiping Sabazius, Lydians possessed by Bassareus, and Cretans in the frenzy of Zagreus, all claiming in their cups to have transcended understanding.

Despite good reasons to distrust the thinking of others, and to disapprove their actions, Heraclitus argues movingly for truths that any thinking person can understand:

Since mindfulness, of all things,  
is the ground of being,  
to speak one's true mind,  
and to keep things known  
in common, serves all being,  
just as laws made clear  
uphold the city . . .

At this task of speaking his true mind, ancient and modern readers agree, Heraclitus is among the greatest writers of his language, comparable for the shapeliness and power of his style even to the finest writer of his lifetime, the

first of the great playwrights, Aeschylus. This liveliness of style is all the more engaging because the life of Heraclitus is also remarkable. An early and abiding influence on Christian thought is famously transparent in the Heraclitean language that opens the Gospel According to John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The scientific purport of Heraclitus has remained startling and valuable for twenty-five hundred years, his social satire has kept its edge, and his contributions to philosophy, formative in his time, have been enduring.

Ironically, the great writer keeps insisting upon the limits of his art as a way toward wisdom. He says, "To a god the wisdom of the wisest man sounds apish. Beauty in a human face looks apish too. In everything we have attained the excellence of apes."

This is funny, first of all, and very dark as its persuasiveness sinks in, but finally it reveals itself to be the lucid darkness of a truth that speakers of English at the present millennium are still privileged to consider. "To be evenminded is the greatest virtue," Heraclitus still persuades us. "Wisdom is to speak the truth and act in keeping with its nature."

## *A Note on the Translation*

Naturally, I had read translations of Heraclitus in English before I did my own. The first was the excellent version Philip Wheelwright did in the 1950s. Later, Guy Davenport published another fine translation in the 1970s. As I worked, I referred to several versions, most closely to the Loeb Classical Library text, edited and translated by H. W. S. Jones, whose literal translation guided me through the Greek. Jones in his work followed the nineteenth-century text assembled by Ingram Bywater, using the subsequent scholarship of Jacob Bernays, Hermann Diels, and others. Scholarship on Heraclitus that has shaped my thinking includes work by Charles Burnet, G. S. Kirk, and Charles H. Kahn.

The existing fragments of Heraclitus are divided into three types: supposedly direct quotations, reputed paraphrases, and commentaries. Since the accuracy of these sources can never be established, I have tried to make the most of what we have by tailoring paraphrase and commentary to fit stylistically with quotes. I chose this procedure for the sake of a reader's sustained connection with my English version, confident that those misled by my approach can easily turn to the excellent scholarship available. My translation uses free verse to suggest the poetic ring of the original prose, which deserves to be called poetry as much as the metrical writings of thinkers like Empedocles and Parmenides.

Aside from this general procedure, I have stayed close to literal paraphrase, wherever this seemed adequate, and where I have deviated, I have tried to explain my thinking in the notes at the end of this volume.

## FRAGMENTS

### The Collected Wisdom of HERACLITUS

1

Τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι  
γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ  
ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον. γινομένων γὰρ πάντων  
κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισι εἰκόσσι  
πειρώμενοι καὶ ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων  
οἰοῖν ἐγὼ διηγέσθαι, διαιρέων ἕκαστον κατὰ  
φύσιν καὶ φράζων ὅκως ἔχει. τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους  
ἀνθρώπους λανθάνει ὅκόσα ἐγερθέντες  
ποιέουσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὅκόσα εὖδοντες  
ἐπλανθάνονται.

1

The Word proves  
those first hearing it  
as numb to understanding  
as the ones who have not heard.

Yet all things follow from the Word.

Some, blundering  
with what I set before you,

try in vain with empty talk  
to separate the essences of things  
and say how each thing truly is.

And all the rest make no attempt.  
They no more see  
how they behave broad waking  
than remember clearly  
what they did asleep.



2

Οὐκ ἔμευ ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἀκούσαντας  
ὁμολογέειν σοφὸν ἔστι, ἔν πάντα εἶναι.

3

Ἄξύνετοι ἀκούσαντες κωφοῖσι εἰκόασι· φάτις  
αὐτοῖσι μαρτυρεῖ παρεόντας ἀπειναι.

4

Κακοὶ μάρτυρες ἀνθρώποισι ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ  
ὦτα, βαρβάρους ψυχὰς ἔχόντων.

5

Οὐ φρονέουσι τοιαῦτα πολλοὶ ὀκόσσοι  
ἐγκυρέουσι οὐδὲ μαθόντες γινώσκουσι,  
ἐωυτοῖσι δὲ δοκέουσι.

not to me but to the Word,  
and know that all is one.

3

Those unmindful when they hear,  
for all they make of their intelligence,  
may be regarded as the walking dead.

4

People dull their wits with gibberish,  
and cannot use their ears and eyes.

5

Many fail to grasp what they have seen,  
and cannot judge what they have learned,  
although they tell themselves they know.

6

Ἄκοῦσαι οὐκ ἐπιστάμενοι οὐδ' εἰπεῖν.

7

Ἐὰν μὴ ἔλπῃαι, ἀνέλπιστον οὐκ ἐξευρήσει,  
ἀνεξερεύνητον ἐὼν καὶ ἄπορον.

8

Χρυσὸν οἱ διζήμενοι γῆν πολλὴν ὀρύσσουσι  
καὶ εὐρίσκουσι ὀλίγον.

9

Ἀγχιβασίην.

to listen or to speak.

7

Whoever cannot seek  
the unforeseen sees nothing,  
for the known way  
is an impasse.

8

Men dig tons of earth  
to find an ounce of gold.

9

*See note.*

10

Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ.

11

Ὁ ἄναξ οὐ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς,  
οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει, ἀλλὰ σημαίνει.

12

Σίβυλλα δὲ μαινομένῳ στόματι ἀγέλαστα καὶ  
ἀκαλλώπιστα καὶ ἀμύριστα φθεγγομένη χιλίων  
ἐτέων ἐξικνέεται τῇ φωνῇ διὰ τὸν θεόν.

13

Ὅσων ὄψις ἀκοῇ μάθησις, ταῦτα ἐγὼ  
προτιμέω.

10

Things keep their secrets.

11

Yet without obscurity  
or needless explanation  
the true prophet signifies.

12

The prophet's voice possessed of god  
requires no ornament, no sweetening of tone,  
but carries over a thousand years.

13

The eye, the ear,  
the mind in action,  
these I value.

14

Τοῦτο γὰρ ἴδιόν ἐστι τῶν νῦν καιρῶν, ἐν οἷς  
πάντων πλωτῶν καὶ πορευτῶν γεγονότων οὐκ  
ἂν ἔτι πρέπον εἶν ποιηταῖς καὶ μυθογράφοις  
χρησθαι μάρτυσι περὶ τῶν ἀγνοουμένων, ὅπερ  
οἱ πρὸ ἡμῶν περὶ τῶν πλείστων, ἀπίστους  
ἀμφισβητουμένων παρεχόμενοι βεβαιωτὰς  
κατὰ τὸν Ἡράκλειτον.

15

Ὅφθαλμοὶ τῶν ὥτων ἀκριβέστεροι μάρτυρες.

16

Πολυμαθὴν νόον ἔχειν οὐ διδάσκει·  
Ἑσίοδον γὰρ ἂν ἐδίδαξε καὶ Πυθαγόρην·  
αὐτὶς τε Ξενοφάνεα καὶ Ἑκαταῖον.

we need no longer take the poets  
and myth-makers for sure witnesses  
about disputed facts.

15

What eyes witness,  
ears believe on hearsay.

16

If learning were a path of wisdom,  
those most learned about myth  
would not believe, with Hesiod,  
that Pallas in her wisdom gloats  
over the noise of battle.



17

Πυθαγόρης Μνησάρχου ιστορίην ἤσκησε  
ἀνθρώπων μάλιστα πάντων. καὶ ἐκλεξάμενος  
ταύτας τὰς συγγραφὰς ἐποίησατο ἐωυτοῦ  
σοφίην, πολυμαθίην, κακοτεχνίην.

18

Ὅκοσων λόγους ἤκουσα οὐδεὶς ἀφικνέεται ἐς  
τοῦτο, ὥστε γινώσκειν ὅτι σοφόν ἐστὶ πάντων  
κεχωρισμένον.

19

Ἐν τῷ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην ἢ  
κυβερνᾶται πάντα διὰ πάντων.

the deepest in his learning of all men.  
And still he claimed to recollect  
details of former lives,  
being in one a cucumber  
and one time a sardine.

18

Of all the words yet spoken,  
none comes quite as far as wisdom,  
which is the action of the mind  
beyond all things that may be said.

19

Wisdom is the oneness  
of mind that guides  
and permeates all things.

Κόσμον τόνδε τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων οὔτε τις  
θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησε, ἀλλ' ἦν αἰεὶ καὶ  
ἔστι καὶ ἔσται πῦρ αἰζῶον ἀπτόμενον μέτρα  
καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα.

Πυρὸς τροπαὶ πρῶτον θάλασσα· θαλάσσης δὲ  
τὸ μὲν ἡμῖσι γῆ, τὸ δὲ ἡμῖσι πρηστήρ.

Πυρὸς ἀνταμείβεται πάντα καὶ πῦρ ἀπάντων,  
ὥσπερ χρυσοῦ χρήματα καὶ χρημάτων χρυσός.

and is, and will be everliving fire,  
the same for all, the cosmos,  
made neither by god nor man,  
replenishes in measure  
as it burns away.

21

Fire in its ways of changing  
is a sea transfigured  
between forks of lightning  
and the solid earth.

22

As all things change to fire,  
and fire exhausted  
falls back into things,  
the crops are sold  
for money spent on food.

23

Θάλασσα διαχέεται καὶ μετρίεται ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν  
λόγον ὁκοῖος πρόσθεν ἦν ἢ γενέσθαι.

24

Χρημοσύνη . . . κόρος.

25

Ζῆ πῦρ τὸν ἀέρος θάνατον, καὶ ἀῆρ ζῆ τὸν  
πυρὸς θάνατον· ὕδωρ ζῆ τὸν γῆς θάνατον, γῆ  
τὸν ὕδατος.

23

The earth is melted

into the sea  
by that same reckoning  
whereby the sea  
sinks into the earth.

24

Hunger, even  
in the elements,  
and insolence.

25

Air dies giving birth  
to fire. Fire dies  
giving birth to air. Water,  
thus, is born of dying  
earth, and earth of water.

26

Πάντα τὸ πῦρ ἐπελθὼν κρινέει καὶ  
καταλήψεται.

27

Τὸ μὴ δυνόν ποτε πῶς ἂν τις λάθοι ;

28

Τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει κεραυνός.

29

Ἥλιος οὐχ ὑπερβήσεται μέτρα· εἰ δὲ μή,  
Ἑρινύες μιν δίκης ἐπίκουροι ἐξευρήσουσι.

is the judge and ravisher.

27

How, from a fire  
that never sinks  
or sets,  
would you escape?

28

One thunderbolt strikes  
root through everything.

29

No being, not the sun  
itself, exceeds due measure,  
but contending powers  
set things right.



30

Ἦοὺς καὶ ἐσπέρης τέρματα ἢ ἄρκτος, καὶ  
ἀντίον τῆς ἄρκτου οὖρος αἰθρίου Διός.

31

Εἰ μὴ ἥλιος ἦν, ἔνεκα τῶν ἄλλων ἄστρον  
εὐφρόνη ἂν ἦν.

32

Νέος ἐφ' ἡμέρῃ ἥλιος.

around the pivot  
of the North.  
Southward lies  
the zone  
of greater light.

31

Without the sun,  
what day? What night?

32

The sun is new  
again, all day.

Δοκεῖ δὲ [Θαλῆς] κατὰ τινὰς πρῶτος  
 ἀστρολογῆσαι καὶ ἡλιακὰς ἐκλείψεις καὶ  
 τροπὰς προειπεῖν, ὥς φησιν Εὐδημος ἐν τῇ  
 περὶ τῶν ἀστρολογουμένων ἱστορίᾳ· ὅθεν  
 αὐτὸν καὶ Ξενοφάνης καὶ Ἡρόδοτος θαυμάζει·  
 μαρτυρεῖ δ' αὐτῷ καὶ Ἡράκλειτος καὶ  
 Δημόκριτος.

Ὦν ὁ ἥλιος ἐπιστάτης ὦν καὶ σκοπός, ὀρίζειν  
 καὶ βραβεύειν καὶ ἀναδεικνύναι καὶ  
 ἀναφαίνειν μεταβολὰς καὶ ὥρας αἱ πάντα  
 φέρουσι . . .

Διδάσκαλος δὲ πλείστων Ἡσίοδος· τοῦτον  
 ἐπίστανται πλεῖστα εἰδέναι, ὅστις ἡμέρην καὶ  
 εὐφρόνην οὐκ ἐγίνωσκε· ἔστι γὰρ ἔν.

saw in forethought—  
clearly as in heaven—  
the eclipse.

34

The sun, timekeeper  
of the day and season,  
oversees all things.

35

Many who have learned  
from Hesiod the countless names  
of gods and monsters  
never understand  
that night and day are one.

36

Ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμῶν θέρος,  
πόλεμος εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός· ἀλλοιοῦται δὲ  
ὅκωπερ πῦρ, ὅκῳ ταν συμμιγῇ θυώμασι,  
ὀνομάζεται καθ' ἡδονὴν ἐκάστου.

37

Εἰ πάντα τὰ ὄντα καπνὸς γένοιτο, ῥῖνες  
ἂν διαγνοῖεν.

38

Αἱ ψυχὰὶ ὁσμῶνται καθ' ἄδην.

as day yields night,  
so winter summer,  
war peace, plenty famine.  
All things change.  
Fire penetrates the lump  
of myrrh, until the joining  
bodies die and rise again  
in smoke called incense.

37

If everything  
were turned to smoke,  
the nose would  
be the seat of judgment.

38

Thus in the abysmal dark  
the soul is known by scent.

39

Τὰ ψυχρὰ θέρεται, θερμὸν ψύχεται, ὑγρὸν  
αὐαίνεται, καρφαλέον νοτίζεται.

40

Σκίδνησι καὶ συνάγει, πρόσσεισι καὶ  
ἄπεισι.

41

Ποταμοῖσι δις τοῖσι αὐτοῖσι οὐκ ἂν  
ἐμβαίης· ἕτερα γὰρ <καὶ ἕτερα> ἐπιρρέει  
ὕδατα.

and warmth soon cools.  
So moisture dries,  
and dry things drown.

40

What was scattered  
gathers.  
What was gathered  
blows apart.

41

The river  
where you set  
your foot just now  
is gone—  
those waters  
giving way to this,  
now this.

42

*Omitted, see note.*



Καὶ Ἡράκλειτος ἐπιτιμᾷ τῷ ποιήοντι· ὥς  
 ἔρις ἔκ τε θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων ἀπόλοιτο· οὐ  
 γὰρ ἂν εἶναι ἀρμονίαν μὴ ὄντος ὀξέος καὶ  
 βαρέος, οὐδὲ τὰ ζῷα ἄνευ θήλεος καὶ ἄρρενος,  
 ἐναντίων ὄντων.

Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι πάντων  
 δὲ βασιλεύς, καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε  
 τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς μὲν δούλους ἐποίησε  
 τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους.

The poet was a fool  
 who wanted no conflict  
 among us, gods  
 or people.  
 Harmony needs  
 low and high,  
 as progeny needs  
 man and woman.

War, as father  
of all things, and king,  
names few  
to serve as gods,  
and of the rest makes  
these men slaves,  
those free.

45

Οὐ ξυνίασι ὅκως διαφερόμενον ἐωυτῷ  
ὁμολογέει· παλίντονος ἀρμονίη ὅκωσπερ τόξου  
καὶ λύρης.

46

Καὶ περὶ αὐτῶν τούτων ἀνώτερον  
ἐπιζητοῦσι καὶ φυσικώτερον . . . καὶ  
Ἡράκλειτος τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον, καὶ ἐκ τῶν  
διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἀρμονίαν, καὶ πάντα  
κατ' ἔριν γίνεσθαι.

47

Ἀρμονίη ἀφανὴς φανερῆς κρείσσων.

48

Μὴ εἰκῇ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων συμβαλόμεθα.

that strains against itself,  
needs strength, as does the arm  
to string the bow or lyre.

46

From the strain  
of binding opposites  
comes harmony.

47

The harmony past knowing sounds  
more deeply than the known.

48

Yet let's not make  
rash guesses  
our most lucid thoughts.

49

Χρὴ εὖ μάλα πολλῶν ἱστορας φιλοσόφους  
ἄνδρας εἶναι.

50

Γναφέων ὁδὸς εὐθεΐα καὶ σκολιῇ μία ἐστὶ  
καὶ ἡ αὐτή.

51

Ὅνοι σύρματ' ἂν ἔλαιντο μάλλον ἢ  
χρυσόν.

need sound intelligence.

50

Under the comb  
the tangle and the straight path  
are the same.

51

An ass prefers a bed of litter  
to a golden throne.

52

Θάλασσα ὕδωρ καθαρώτατον καὶ  
μιαρώτατον, ἰχθύσι μὲν πότιμον καὶ σωτήριον,  
ἀνθρώποις δὲ ἄποτον καὶ ὀλέθριον.

53

Sues coeno, cohortales aves pulvere (vel  
cinere) lavari.

54

*Omitted as repetition of 53.*

55

Πᾶν ἑρπετὸν πληγῇ νέμεται.

52

The sea is both pure  
and tainted, healthy  
and good haven to the fish,  
to men impotable and deadly.

53

Poultry bathe  
in dust and ashes,  
swine in filth.

Hungry livestock,  
though in sight of pasture,  
need the prod.



56

Παλίντονος ἀρμονίη κόσμου ὅκωσπερ  
λύρης καὶ τόξου.

57

Ἄγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν ταῦτόν.

58

Καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν [ἐν ἐσσι]· οἱ γοῦν  
ἰατροί, φηοῖν ὁ Ἡράκλειτος, τέμνοντες  
καίοντες πάντη βασανίζοντες κακῶς τοὺς  
ἀρρωστοῦντας ἐπαιτιέονται μηδέν ἄξιον  
μισθὸν λαμβάνειν παρὰ τῶν ἀρρωστοῦντων,  
ταῦτα ἐργαζόμενοι τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὰς νόσους.

by harmony of tensions,  
like the lyre and bow.

57

Therefore, good  
and ill are one.

58

Good and ill to the physician  
surely must be one,  
since he derives his fee  
from torturing the sick.

59

Συνάψεις οὔλα καὶ οὐχὶ οὔλα,  
συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συνῆδον  
διῆδον· ἐκ πάντων ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα.

60

Δίκης οὔνομα οὐκ ἂν ᾔδεσαν, εἰ ταῦτα μὴ  
ᾔν.

61

Ἡράκλειτος λέγει, ὥς τῷ μὲν θεῷ καλὰ  
πάντα καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ δίκαια, ἄνθρωποι δὲ ἃ  
μὲν ἄδικα ὑπειλήφασιν, ἃ δὲ δίκαια.

59

Two made one are never one.

Arguing the same we disagree.  
Singing together we compete.  
We choose each other  
to be one, and from the one  
both soon diverge.

60

Without injustices,  
the name of justice  
would mean what?

61

While cosmic wisdom  
understands all things  
are good and just,  
intelligence may find  
injustice here, and justice  
somewhere else.

62

Είδέναι χρή τὸν πόλεμον ἔοντα ξυνόν, καὶ  
δίκην ἔριν· καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ  
χρεώμενα.

63

Ἔστι γὰρ εἰμαρμένα πάντως . . .

64

Θάνατός ἐστι ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ὀρέομεν,  
ὁκόσα δὲ εὕδοντες ὕπνος.

65

Ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μῶνον λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει  
καὶ ἐθέλει Ζηνὸς οὖνομα.

We cannot help but see  
war makes us as we are.

63

Thus are things decreed by fate.

64

Though what the waking see is deadly,  
what the sleeping see is death.

65

The oneness of all wisdom  
may be found, or not,  
under the name of God.

66

Τοῦ βιοῦ οὖνομα βίος, ἔργον δὲ θάνατος.

67

Ἀθάνατοι θνητοί, θνητοί ἀθάνατοι, ζῶντες  
τὸν ἐκείνων θάνατον τὸν δὲ ἐκείνων βίον  
τεθνεώτες.

68

Ψυχῆσι γὰρ θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι, ὕδατι  
δὲ θάνατος γῆν γενέσθαι· ἐκ γῆς δὲ ὕδωρ  
γίνεται, ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ ψυξίη.

66

The living, when the dead  
wood of the bow  
springs back to life, must die.

67

Gods live past our meager death.  
We die past their ceaseless living.

68

As souls change into water  
on their way through death,  
so water changes into earth.  
And as water springs from earth,  
so from water does the soul.



69

Ὅδος ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡυτή.

70

Ξυνὸν ἀρχὴ καὶ πέρας.

71

Ψυχῆς πείρατα οὐκ ἂν ἐξεύροιο πᾶσαν  
ἐπιπορευόμενος ὁδόν· οὕτω βαθὺν λόγον ἔχει.

69

The way up is the way back.

70

The beginning is the end.

The soul is undiscovered,  
though explored forever  
to a depth beyond report.

72

Ψυχῆσι τέρψις ὑγρῆσι γενέσθαι.

73

Ἀνὴρ ὁκότη' ἂν μεθυσθῇ, ἄγεται ὑπὸ παιδὸς  
ἀνήβου σφαλλόμενος, οὐκ ἐπαΐων ὅκη βαίνει,  
ὑγρὴν τὴν ψυχὴν ἔχων.

74

Λύη ψυχὴ σοφωτάτη καὶ ἀρίστη.

72

Moisture makes the soul  
succumb to joy.

73

An old drunk  
leaning on a youngster,  
saturated with bad wine,  
head weaker than his feet . . .

74

Dry, the soul  
grows wise  
and good.

75

Αὐγὴ ξηρὴ ψυχὴ σοφοτάτη καὶ ἀρίστη.

76

Οὐ γὰρ ξηρὴ, ψυχὴ σοφοτάτη καὶ ἀρίστη.

77

Ἄνθρωπος, ὅπως ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φάος,  
ἄπτεται ἀποσβέννυται.

78

Ταῦτ' εἶναι ζῶν καὶ τεθνηκός, καὶ τὸ  
ἐγρηγορὸς καὶ τὸ καθεῦδον, καὶ νέον καὶ  
γηραιόν· τάδε γὰρ μεταπεσόντα ἐκεῖνα ἐστὶ  
κάκεῖνα πάλιν μεταπεσόντα ταῦτα.

75

A dry light dries the earth.

76

*See note.*

77

A man in the quiet of the night  
is kindled like a fire soon quenched.

78

Only the living may be dead,  
the waking sleep,  
the young be old.

79

Αἰὼν παῖς ἐστὶ παίζων περσοεύων· παιδὸς  
ἢ βασιληΐη.

80

Ἐδιζησάμην ἐμεωυτόν.

81

Ποταμοῖσι τοῖσι αὐτοῖσι ἐμβαίνομέν τε  
καὶ οὐκ ἐμβαίνομεν, εἶμέν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶμεν.

79

Time is a game  
played beautifully  
by children.

80

Applicants for wisdom  
do what I have done:  
inquire within.

81

Just as the river where I step  
is not the same, and is,  
so I am as I am not.



82

Κάματός ἐστι τοῖς αὐτοῖς μοχθεῖν καὶ  
ἄρχεσθαι.

83

Μεταβάλλον ἀναπαύεται.

84

Καὶ ὁ κυκεὼν δίσταται μὴ κινεόμενος.

85

Νέκυες κοπρίων ἐκβλητότεροι.

its subject weary  
is a sentence  
of hard labor.

83

For this reason,  
change gives rest.

84

Goat cheese melted  
in warm wine congeals  
if not well stirred.

85

Corpses, like night soil,  
get carted off.

86

Γενόμενοι ζώειν ἐθέλουσι μόρους τ' ἔχειν·  
μᾶλλον δὲ ἀναπαύεσθαι, καὶ παῖδας  
καταλείπουσι μόρους γενέσθαι.

87

Οἱ μὲν “ἡβῶντος” ἀναγινώσκοντες ἔτη  
τριάκοντα ποιοῦσι τὴν γενεάν καθ'  
Ἑράκλειπον· ἐν ᾧ χρόνῳ γεννῶντα παρέχει τὸν  
ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγεννημένον ὁ γεννήσας.

88

Ὅθεν οὐκ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ Ἑράκλειτος  
γενεὰν τὸν μῆνα καλεῖ.

86

The living, though they yearn  
for consummation of their fate,  
need rest, and in their turn leave  
children to fulfill their doom.

87

In thirty years a newborn boy  
can grow to father him a son  
who grows by then  
to father sons himself.

88

Thirty, therefore, names  
the moon of generation.

89

Ex homine in tricennio potest avus haberi.

90

Ἐργάτας εἶναι λέγει καὶ συνεργοὺς τῶν ἐν  
τῷ κόσμῳ γινομένων.

89

Look: the baby born  
under the new moon  
under the old moon holds  
her grandchild in her arms.

Even a soul submerged in sleep  
is hard at work, and helps  
make something of the world.

Ξυνόν ἐστι πᾶσι τὸ φρονέειν. Ξὺν νόῳ  
λέγοντας ἰσχυρίζεσθαι χρὴ τῷ Ξυνῷ πάντων,  
ὅκωπερ νόμῳ πόλις καὶ πολὺ ἰσχυροτέρως.  
τρέφονται γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἀνθρώπειοι νόμοι ὑπὸ  
ἐνὸς τοῦ θείου· κρατέει γὰρ τοσοῦτον ὁκόσον  
ἐθέλει καὶ ἐξαρκείει πᾶσι καὶ περιγίνεται.

Since mindfulness, of all things,  
is the ground of being,  
to speak one's true mind,  
and to keep things known  
in common, serves all being,  
just as laws made clear  
uphold the city,  
yet with greater strength.  
Of all pronouncements of the law  
the one source is the Word  
whereby we choose what helps  
true mindfulness prevail.

Διὸ δεῖ ἔπεσθαι τῷ ξυνῷ. τοῦ λόγου δ'  
 ἐόντος ξυνοῦ, ζώουσι οἱ πολλοὶ ὡς ἰδίην  
 ἔχοντες φρόνησιν.

ᾧ μάλιστα διηνεκέως ὁμιλέουσι, τούτῳ  
 διαφέρονται.

Although we need the Word  
 to keep things known in common,  
 people still treat specialists  
 as if their nonsense  
 were a form of wisdom.

Fools seek counsel

from the ones they doubt.

94

Οὐ δεῖ ὥσπερ καθεύδοντας ποιεῖν καὶ  
λέγειν.

95

Τοῖς ἐγρηγοροῖσιν ἓνα καὶ κοινὸν κόσμον  
εἶναι, τῶν δὲ κοιμωμένων ἕκαστον εἰς ἴδιον  
ἀποστρέφεσθαι.

96

Ἦθος γὰρ ἀνθρώπειον μὲν οὐκ ἔχει  
γνώμας, θεῖον δὲ ἔχει.

97

Ἄνῆρ νήπιος ἤκουσε πρὸς δαίμονος  
ὅκωσπερ παῖς πρὸς ἀνδρός.

People need not act and speak  
as if they were asleep.

95

The waking have one world  
in common. Sleepers  
meanwhile turn aside, each  
into a darkness of his own.

96

The habit of knowledge  
is not human but divine.

97

The language of a grown man,  
to the cosmic powers,  
sounds like babytalk to men.



Ἀνθρώπων ὁ σοφώτατος πρὸς θεὸν πίθηκος  
 φανεῖται καὶ σοφία καὶ κάλλει καὶ τοῖς  
 ἄλλοις πᾶσιν.

Πιθήκων ὁ κάλλιστος αἰσχροὺς ἄλλῳ γένει  
 συμβάλλειν.

To a god the wisdom  
 of the wisest man  
 sounds apish. Beauty  
 in a human face  
 looks apish too.  
 In everything  
 we have attained

the excellence of apes.

99

The ape apes find  
most beautiful  
looks apish  
to non-apes.

100

Μάχεσθαι χρή τὸν δῆμον ὑπὲρ τοῦ νόμου  
ὅκως ὑπὲρ τείχεος.

101

Μόροι γὰρ μέζονες μέζονας μοίρας  
λαγχάνουσι.

102

Ἄρηιφάτους θεοὶ τιμῶσι καὶ ἄνθρωποι.

103

Ὑβριν χρή σβεννύνειν μᾶλλον ἢ πυρκαϊήν.

100

People ought to fight  
to keep their law  
as to defend the city's walls.

101

The luckiest men die  
worthwhile deaths.

102

Gods, like men, revere the boys  
who die for them in battle.

103

Insolence needs drowning  
worse than wildfire.

Ἀνθρώποισι γίνεσθαι ὁκόσα θέλουσι οὐκ  
 ἄμεινον. νοῦσος ὑγίειαν ἐποίησε ἡδύ, κακὸν  
 ἀγαθόν, λιμὸς κόρον, κάματος ἀνάπαυσιν.

Θυμῷ μάχεσθαι χαλεπὸν· ὅ τι γὰρ ἂν χρηζῇ  
 γίνεσθαι, ψυχῆς ὠνέεται.

Always having what we want  
 may not be the best good fortune.  
 Health seems sweetest  
 after sickness, food  
 in hunger, goodness  
 in the wake of evil, and at the end  
 of daylong labor sleep.

105

Yearning hurts,  
and what release  
may come of it  
feels much like death.

106

Ἀνθρώποισι πᾶσι μέτεστι γινώσκειν ἑαυτοὺς  
καὶ σωφρονεῖν.

107

Σωφρονεῖν ἀρετὴ μέγιστη· καὶ σοφίῃ ἀληθέα  
λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἐπαίοντας.

106

All people ought to know themselves  
and everyone be wholly mindful.

To be evenminded  
is the greatest virtue.  
Wisdom is to speak  
the truth and act  
in keeping with its nature.

108

Ἄμαθίην ἄμεινον κρύπτειν· ἔργον δὲ ἐν ἀνέσει  
καὶ παρ' οἶνον.

109

Κρύπτειν ἀμαθίην κρέσσον ἢ ἐς τὸ μέσον  
φέρειν.

110

Νόμος καὶ βουλῇ πείθεσθαι ἐνός.

108

Not to be quite such a fool  
sounds good. The trick,  
with so much wine  
and easy company, is how.



109

Stupidity is better  
kept a secret  
than displayed.

110

Sound thinking  
is to listen well and choose  
one course of action.

111

Τίς γὰρ αὐτῶν νόος ἢ φρήν ; [δῆμων] ἀοιδοῖσι  
ἔπονται καὶ διδασκάλῳ χρέωνται ὁμίλῳ, οὐκ  
εἰδότες ὅτι πολλοὶ κακοὶ ὀλίγοι δὲ ἀγαθοί.  
αἰρεῦνται γὰρ ἐν ἀντία πάντων οἱ ἄριστοι,  
κλέος ἀέναον θνητῶν, οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ κεκόρηνται  
ὄκωσπερ κτήνεα.

111

What use are these people's wits,  
who let themselves be led  
by speechmakers, in crowds,  
without considering  
how many fools and thieves  
they are among, and how few  
choose the good?

The best choose progress  
toward one thing, a name  
forever honored by the gods,  
while others eat their way  
toward sleep like nameless oxen.

112

Ἐν Πριήνῃ Βίας ἐγένετο ὁ Τευτάμεω, οὐ  
πλέων λόγος ἢ τῶν ἄλλων.

113

Εἷς ἐμοὶ μύριοι, ἐὰν ἄριστος ᾖ.

112

Not far from the ancient city  
of Miletus lived  
the son of Teutamas,  
whose name was Bias.  
I would have it known,  
this one man more than others

earned the good esteem  
of worthy people.

113

Give me one man  
from among ten thousand,  
if he be the best.

114

Ἄξιον Ἐφεσίοις ἡβηδὸν ἀπάγξασθαι πᾶσι καὶ  
τοῖς ἀνήβοις τὴν πόλιν καταλιπεῖν, οἵτινες  
Ἑρμόδωρον ἄνδρα ἐωυτῶν ὀνήσιον  
ἐξέβαλον, φάντες· ἡμέων μὴδὲ εἷς ὀνήσιος  
ἔστω, εἰ δὲ μή, ἄλλη τε καὶ μετ' ἄλλων.

114

As for the Ephesians,  
I would have them, youths,  
elders, and all those between,  
go hang themselves, leaving the city  
in the abler hands of children.  
With banishment of Hermodoros  
they say, No man should be  
worthier than average. Thus,  
my fellow citizens declare,

whoever would seek  
excellence can find it  
elsewhere among others.

115

Κύνες καὶ βαῦζουσι ὃν ἂν μὴ γινώσκωσι.

116

Ἐπιστὴ διαφυγγάνει μὴ γινώσκεσθαι.

117

Βλὰξ ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ παντὶ λόγῳ ἐπτοῖσθαι  
φιλέει.

118

Δοκεόντα ὁ δοκιμώτατος γινώσκει φυλάσσειν·  
καὶ μέντοι καὶ δίκη καταλήπεται ψευδέων  
τέκτονας καὶ μάρτυρας.

115

Dogs, by this same logic, bark  
at what they cannot understand.

116

What is not yet known  
those blinded by bad faith  
can never learn.

117

Stupidity is doomed,  
therefore, to cringe  
at every syllable  
of wisdom.

118

While those who mouth high talk  
may think themselves high-minded,  
justice keeps the book  
on hypocrites and liars.

119

Τόν θ' Ὅμηρον ἔφασκεν ἄξιον ἐκ τῶν ἀγόνων  
ἐκβάλλεσθαι καὶ ῥαπίζεσθαι, καὶ Ἀρχίλοχον  
ὁμοίως.

120

Unus dies par omni est.

121

ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων.

122

Ἀνθρώπους μένει τελευτήσαντας ἅσσα οὐκ  
ἔλπονται οὐδὲ δοκέουσι.

119

Homer I deem worthy—  
in a trial by combat—  
of good cudgeling,

and Archilochos the same.

120

Any day stands  
equal to the rest.

121

One's bearing  
shapes one's fate.

122

After death comes  
nothing hoped for  
nor imagined.



123

Ἐπανίστασθαι καὶ φύλακας γίνεσθαι ἐγερτὶ  
ζώντων καὶ νεκρῶν.

124

Νυκτιπόλοι, μάγοι, βάκχοι, λῆναι, μύσται.

123

The revenant keeps watch  
over the dead and living.

124

Nightwalker, magus,  
and their entourage,  
bacchants and mystics  
of the wine press,  
with stained faces  
and damp wits . . .

125

Τὰ γὰρ νομιζόμενα κατ' ἀνθρώπους μυστήρια  
ἀνιερωσὶ μυεῦνται.

126

Καὶ τοῖς ἀγάλμασι τουτέοισι εὖχονται, ὅκοῖον  
εἴ τις τοῖς δόμοισι λεσχηνεύοιτο, οὐ τι γινώσκων  
θεοὺς οὐδ' ἥρωας, οἵτινες εἰσι.

125

Initiation, here,  
into the ancient mysteries  
so honored among men  
mocks holiness.

126

They raise their voices  
at stone idols  
as a man might argue  
with his doorpost,  
they have understood  
so little of the gods.

127

Εἰ μὴ γὰρ Διονύσῳ πομπὴν ἐποιεῦντο καὶ  
ὕμνον ἄσµα αἰδοίοισι, ἀναιδέστατα εἴργαστ'  
ἄν· οὗτος δὲ Αἰδῆς καὶ Διόνυσος, ὅτεφ  
μαίνονται καὶ ληναῖζουσιν.

127

Dionysus is their name for death.  
And if they did not claim  
the statue of the drunk  
they worshipped was a god,  
or call their incoherent song  
about his cock their hymn,  
everyone would know  
what filth their shamelessness  
has made of them  
and of the name of god.

Θυοιδῶν τοίνυν τίθημι διττὰ εἶδη· τὰ μὲν τῶν  
ἀποκεκαθαρμένων παντάπασιν ἀνθρώπων, οἷα  
ἐφ' ἐνὸς ἄν ποτε γένοιτο σπανίως, ὥς φησιν  
Ἡράκλειτος, ἢ τινῶν ὀλίγων εὐαριθμήτων  
ἀνδρῶν· τὰ δ' ἔνυλα καὶ σωματοειδῇ καὶ διὰ  
μεταβολῆς συνιστάμενα, οἷα τοῖς ἔτι  
κατεχομένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀρμόζει.

Καθαίρονται δὲ αἵματι μαινόμενοι ὥσπερ ἄν  
εἴ τις ἐς πηλὸν ἐμβὰς πηλῷ ἀπονίζοιτο.

Ἄκεα.

may be performed by one  
entirely purified but seldom.  
Other rites belong to those  
confined in the sodden  
lumber of the body.

129

Tainted souls who try  
to purify themselves with blood  
are like the man  
who steps in filth and thinks  
to bathe in sewage.

130

Silence, healing.

## Notes

*On the order:* This book retains, in all but a few places, the ordering and numbering of fragments from Bywater's nineteenth-century arrangement, grouped by topic. My deviations from Bywater are noted below. In the early twentieth century, Diels believed that an alphabetical arrangement of the fragments, because it was random, was less tendentious. Wheelwright, on the other hand, observes that Diels himself has been tendentious in using the discontinuity of his arrangement to show that the writings of Heraclitus were not a coherent whole. In my translation, the ordering of fragments, word choice, transitional logic, emphasis on threads of meaning, and so on serve my own best inklings of a coherence and lucidity that have survived the destruction and imperfect representation of what Heraclitus wrote.

1. Bywater 1 and 2 are transposed here to put the poetic passage about the Word first, as several translators have already done. The usual translation of the Greek *logos* has been "Word." This reverberates with the diction in the Standard Version of the Gospel According to John: "In the beginning was the Word." John must have had the powerful tradition of Heraclitean thought in mind when he used this term in his original Greek. *Logos* indicates not only the lexical word, but also all means of making ideas known, as well as ideas themselves, the phenomena to which ideas respond, and the rules that govern both phenomena and ideas. The holistic logic (*logos*) of this range of meanings must have been a large part of the word's appeal, as the next fragment confirms. In the second sentence in the Greek, ambiguous syntax may suggest that Heraclitus separated the essences of things and said how each thing truly is. It may mean, on the other hand, that the ignorant fail to do this. The latter seems more plausible, since Heraclitus makes no other such personal claim for his accomplishment, but insists repeatedly on the limits of such claims, as in the next fragment.
2. See the note on 1.
9. The discussion of Heraclitus here omitted is from the *Suda*, or *Suidas*, an unreliable literary encyclopedia from about the tenth century C.E.
11. See the note on 12.
12. The Greek word *Sibylla*, or "Sibyl," appears in this fragment for the first time ever. No one knows where it came from. *Ton theon*, "the god" of sibylline prophecy, *Ho anax* of the previous fragment, was the Lord Apollo, god of prophetic wisdom and of the cosmic fire of the sun. For more about the word *theos*, see the Introduction.
16. I have provided my own examples from Hesiod and Pythagoras in this and the next fragment, to illustrate their supposed folly. Heraclitus, no doubt, would have chosen other examples.
17. See note on 16.
24. The usual translation of *koros*, as satiety, gives the literal meaning, but loses the strong connotation of insolence, important to the personifying logic of this and many other fragments.
31. Jones's literal translation of this fragment is: "If there were no sun, there would be night, in spite of the other stars." Because the sense of the Greek seems incomplete, I introduce the questions into my translation, to suggest possible connections with the logic of reversal in fragments 35, 36, and elsewhere.
35. This rough paraphrase introduces the mention of gods and monsters to clarify the distinction between the polymorphous concreteness of Hesiod and the unifying abstract thought Heraclitus preferred.
36. The exact phrasing of the original Greek is difficult, but scholars agree about the

general sense. I have simplified the second half, which says literally that fire mixed with various spices assumes various names.

41. This, the most famous fragment, is usually translated: "You cannot step in the same river twice." According to Plutarch, Heraclitus says, "You cannot step into the same rivers twice." My rephrasing tries to clear away distractingly familiar language from a startling thought. It seems unlikely to my mind that the ancient authors who refer to this idea quote Heraclitus exactly.
42. Here Stobaeus quotes Arius Didymus's report of what Cleanthes thought about what Heraclitus said. I have omitted this as a less interesting and less reliable version of the same passage as reported by Plutarch in fragment 41.
51. Heraclitus is quoted as saying, "An ass prefers straw [or refuse] to gold." Aristotle, who takes this to refer to food, does not say whether the reference to food is explicit in the original or his own inference.
53. This fragment, like fragments 89 and 120, exists only in a Latin paraphrase of the Greek.
54. This fragment is omitted as repetition of the second part of 53.
60. I have introduced a question here to compensate for a vagueness that seems to come from loss of context.
66. An untranslatable pun in this fragment involves the Greek words for bow and life, *bíos* and *bíos*.
76. Fragments 74, 75, and 76 overlap. This translation separates the sense of 74 and 75, and omits 76.
89. This fragment, like fragments 53 and 120, exists only in a Latin paraphrase of the Greek.
112. The name of the town here is Phriene. But little is known about Phriene, so I mention nearby Miletus instead. Miletus was an important city from the heyday of Minoan culture until the Ionian revolt in Heraclitus's time.
120. This fragment, like fragments 53 and 89, exists only in a Latin paraphrase of the Greek.
121. This fragment is often translated: "Character is fate." More literally, a man's *ethos* is his *daimon*. A person's customary ways of being and acting, in other words, are that person's guiding genius. I prefer the crisper phrasing, "Character is fate," because the Greek is crisp, but meanings lost in the pithier version seem worth keeping.
129. Fragments 129 and 130 are transposed for the sake of resolution.
130. The one word, *akê*, has several meanings: silence, calm, lulling, healing.

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